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Effects of Personality Preferences and Perceptions of Others' Conflict Styles Impact on Roommate Satisfaction

Candice Morgan
Concordia College - Moorhead, clmorgan@cord.edu

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Candice Morgan
Undergraduate Student
clmorgan@cord.edu
Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Art
Concordia College
Moorhead, MN

ABSTRACT

The researcher sought to determine if personality preferences influenced perceptions of others' conflict styles in roommate relationships. It was hypothesized that perceptions of conflict styles would impact satisfaction. Personality preferences for extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler were measured along with perceptions of the roommate's conflict style and overall satisfaction with the relationship. Surveys were distributed and completed at the end of first semester by 133 first-year students living in college residence halls. Results partially supported the prediction that personality preferences would impact perceptions of roommate's conflict styles. Consistent with previous studies, participants perceived the conflict styles of integrating, compromising, and obliging to be generally more positive strategies of handling conflict and were associated with greater satisfaction. Dominating was seen to have no impact on satisfaction, and lastly, avoiding was viewed to be a negative conflict style and associated with less satisfaction.

Each fall thousands of incoming freshmen swarm into college residence halls loaded with everything from twin extra-long sheets and shower shoes. Many have longingly anticipated this time of finally leaving home and heading off for college to meet new friends and most desired of all, gain new freedoms. However, in spite of all the excitement, anxiety can come about due to the ongoing ordeal of being away from the comforts of home, old friends, and family. It is easy for first-year students to be taken aback by the difficulties that they will face. Days consist of tough classes, demanding professors, and nights are long with taxing coursework. There are pressures to declare a major, the mere task of finding new friends, and of particular interest to the researcher in this study, the challenge of adjusting to living with a complete stranger.

Lovejoy, Perkins, and Collins (1995) suggest that roommate relationships have a uniqueness about them due to their high level of contact with someone unfamiliar. It may be the first time that a freshman student has to share a living space, and despite even the best intentions on behalf of both parties, it is not always easy to maintain the peace. Conflict is seemingly unavoidable and dealing with roommate problems can certainly be an irritating and frustrating experience.

Roommate conflicts can arise over differences in sleeping and living habits, cleanliness, personal belongings that can be shared versus borrowed, food, and so forth. Take for instance a conflict situation between two roommates, Sara and Lisa. Sara gets frustrated when Lisa brings several friends over to their cramped dorm room while she is trying to study. She feels that communication is the first step to resolving a conflict thus she presents her concerns to Lisa. Sara hopes that they will be able to talk through this and together come up with an agreement to when friends can and cannot visit. Expecting to end the conflict and minimize any future problems, Sara explains to Lisa that she is willing to strike a compromise; however, Lisa is resistant to all conversation. She exclaims that she does not want to talk and storms out of the dorm room.

There are two different conflict styles being used in the above example. Sara is attempting to compromise while it appears that Lisa is more inclined to avoiding the situation. Other conflict styles that Sara and Lisa could have utilized is integrating, obliging, or dominating (Rahim & Magner, 1995). Each style has its strengths, weaknesses, and varying levels of appropriateness for different situations. Typically, the conflict styles have been ranked on a constructive-destructive scale; (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sillars, 1980) styles such as integrating and compromising are seen more positively than dominating and avoiding, and obliging having more mixed reviews. Thus, in the example, an outsider may observe Sara using a constructive, hence more positive conflict management style and Lisa using a more destructive, less preferred conflict style.

Researchers in previous studies have found that constructive conflict resolution has generally been correlated with higher satisfaction in the relationship (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005). With that given, Sara should most likely feel less satisfaction because Lisa used avoidance, a less constructive conflict style. Accordingly, Lisa should experience more satisfaction with the relationship because her roommate was using compromising, a constructive conflict style. Interestingly, this is usually not the case. It is more likely that Lisa is not satisfied with how her roommate handles conflict despite the fact that the conflict style used is generally perceived more positively. The question is why that may be. In the current study, the researcher attempts to find an answer to this question by taking into consideration the role that perceptions play. In the scenario above, Lisa may not have perceived her roommate to be using compromising; rather she may have perceived her roommate to be dominating and, consequently, experienced less satisfaction. An individual's perceptions of an event may be vastly different from actuality. Even so, these perceptions certainly influence our actions (Young, 1999) and influence the quality of our relationships (Acitelli, Douvan & Veroff, 1993; Hojjat, 2000). Perceptions leave room for error. As a resident assistant, I see these misunderstandings of other's behaviors and actions time and time again.

Roommate relationships have been studied within a variety of contexts including personality (Carey, Hamilton, & Shanklin, 1986; Fuller & Hall, 1996; Heckert et al., 1999), the impact of similarities and differences (Carey, Stanley, & Biggers, 1988; Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-

Otay, 1991; Lovejoy, Perkins, & Collins, 1995; Martin & Anderson, 1995), and choice of conflict style (Sillars, 1980) and their relationship to satisfaction. A limitation of many of the studies is that they have relied on self-reported measures of individual use of conflict styles. A study has yet to ask participants how they view others to manage conflict and, subsequently, their satisfaction with the relationship. The current study is significant in that it aims to develop a greater understanding of satisfaction with a roommate relationship by considering how participants own personality preferences for extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler may affect perceptions of their roommate's conflict coping methods.

Conflict Styles

Booth-Butterfield (2002) describes interpersonal conflict occurring at "any time the actions or attitudes of one person interfere with or create obstacles for the actions of another person" (p. 230). Those in the midst of a conflict have a variety of strategies available to them in which to manage the situation. As Rahim and Magner's (1995) review of literature explains, the development of conflict style typologies traces back to the early twentieth century. They write that in 1940, Mary P. Follett indicated five strategies for managing conflict. Her three main conflict styles included domination, compromise, and integration, with the secondary styles being avoidance and suppression. Then in 1964, Blake and Mouton presented their own classification of the conflict styles that included five styles as well: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and confrontation. These five styles were said to reflect a concern for people and a concern for production – the attitudes of a manager. Later in 1976, Thomas took Blake and Mouton's typology of the conflict styles and modified them to consider people's intentions meaning their degree of cooperativeness or assertiveness.

It was the work of Blake and Mouton and Thomas that laid a foundation for Rahim in 1983 to relate the conflict styles "along two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others" (Rahim & Magner, 1995, p. 122). The combinations that can be created from the dimensions of concern for self and concern for others emerge into Rahim's five conflict styles: integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating, and avoiding (Rahim & Magner, 1995).

In a conflict situation, an individual using an integrating style will show not only high concern for themselves and for their own needs but also for the other party involved (Rahim, 1992; Rahim & Magner, 1995). The essence of this style is successful problem solving (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1992) and collaboration between both parties involved is essential (Rahim, 1992). Gross and Guerrero (2000) explain that, "Integrating behaviors include analytic remarks such as descriptive, disclosive, qualifying, and soliciting statements and conciliatory remarks such as supportive statements, concessions, and statements showing acceptance of responsibility" (p. 205). Facing the conflict issue straight on, an individual using this style will pursue open communication that allows for clear identification of the conflict. Ultimately, the goal is to find a creative solution that will maximize satisfaction and be acceptable for both parties (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1992).

When an acceptable solution for both parties involved cannot be found, a compromise is generally seen as the best alternative (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). An individual who uses this style will show both a moderate concern for self as well as for the other party (Rahim, 1992; Rahim & Magner, 1995). Compromising involves strategies such as meeting halfway or a trade-off (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Not all the needs of an individual will be met when using this style; however, compromising ensures a middle ground for both parties and ensures a win-some, lose-some outcome (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1992).

Finding a middle ground and ensuring that some needs are met is not a main concern for an individual who utilizes an obliging conflict style. This style exhibits a low concern for self and a high concern for others (Rahim, 1992; Rahim & Magner, 1995) and an obliging person would be inclined to neglect their own needs in order to satisfy other people (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1992). Rahim and Magner (1995) state that, "An obliging person attempts to play down the differences and emphasizes commonalities to satisfy the concerns of the other party" (p. 123). Self-sacrifice is apparent with common behaviors including "putting aside one's own needs to please the partner, passively accepting the decision the partner makes, making yielding or conceding statements, denying or failing to express one's needs, and explicitly expressing harmony and cooperation in a conflict episode" (Gross & Guerrero, 2000, p. 206).

Quite the opposite from the submissiveness of the obliging style, individuals that use a dominating conflict style exhibit high concern for self and a low concern for the other party (Rahim, 1992; Rahim & Magner, 1995). Gross and Guerrero (2000) describe the dominating style as including forcing behaviors such as "confrontational remarks, accusations, personal criticism, rejection, hostile imperatives or threats, antagonistic jokes or teasing, aggressive questions, presumptive remarks, and denial of responsibility at the expense of the other person" (p. 206). Ignoring the needs of others (Rahim, 1992), dominating people rely on their power, aggression, and perseverance to win their position (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Rahim, 1992).

The last of the conflict styles, avoiding, is different from the rest in that individuals who use this style would prefer not to acknowledge the presence of conflict. Conflict avoiders would much rather prefer to withdraw or simply postpone the issue until it is no longer a threat (Rahim, 1992). Typical behaviors of avoiding include "being indirect and evasive, changing and/or avoiding topics, employing noncommittal remarks, and making irrelevant remarks or joking as a way to avoid dealing with the conflict at hand" (Gross & Guerrero, 2000, p. 207). Rahim and Magner (1995) have associated avoiding with "withdrawal, passing-the-buck, sidestepping, or 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil' situations" (p. 123). Individuals who use this style will fail to show any concern for the other party as well as for the self (Rahim, 1992; Rahim & Magner, 1995) and their unconcerned attitude (Rahim, 1992) proves to be frustrating predicament for others who would prefer to deal with the conflict (Gross & Guerrero, 2000).

The conflict styles are perceived differently in regards to their varying levels of effectiveness and appropriateness (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Each style has its own advantages and disadvantages, and different situations call for different styles. Hojjat (2000) writes that "according to social-exchange theory (Kelly, 1979: Schaap et al., 1988) both partners in a

relationship seek to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs" (p. 601). He suggested that when individuals employ conflict styles that result in inequity for one or both partners in a conflict (e.g., aggression, withdrawal), their relational satisfaction will be lower than if they had used conflict styles that promote positive outcomes for both partners (e.g., cooperation, negotiation). This study as well as other research supports a socially accepted ranking of the styles according to their level of constructiveness or destructiveness (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sillars, 1980).

There are conflict styles that are preferred over others because they tend to be more associated with positive conflict resolution and increased satisfaction (Acitelli et al., 1993; Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005). The integrating style that shows both high concern for individual goals and the goals of others is the more preferred style and, in previous research studies, is typically seen to correlate the highest with satisfaction (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sillars, 1980). In his study of roommate conflict, Sillars (1980) argued, "the choice of conflict strategies affects the likelihood of conflict resolution and the degree of satisfaction in the interpersonal relationship" (p. 185). His findings indicated integrative strategies to be more highly associated with information exchange which helped to provide a better means for resolving conflict. According to Sillars, "[g]reater exchange of information tends to reduce the discrepancy in information that actors and partners have about intentions, expectations, perceptions, and so forth, and may help identify mutually acceptable solutions to conflict" (p. 185).

When integration for both parties is no longer reasonable, compromising is perceived to be the next best choice. Previous research findings suggest this style is less effective and appropriate than the integrating style and that it falls somewhere in the middle of the appropriateness and effectiveness dimension (Gross & Guerrero, 2002).

The obliging style tends to have mixed reviews. It can be viewed as an appropriate but not an effective method of handling conflict. Accommodators put other's needs and goals before their own which may result in a strain over time (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). This type of behavior may be the most comfortable and adequate response for individuals that oblige because there is no longer a threat in furthering or escalating the conflict (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Obliging may be a constructive conflict style in that it seemingly cools down the conflict; however, this may be to the detriment of the person obliging. It is this lack of concern for oneself that contributes to the negative view of obliging.

Researchers have found that conflict styles such as avoidance and dominating are generally perceived negatively and are the least preferred conflict styles in that they fail to encourage positive problem-solving (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sillars, 1980). Sillars (1980) explains that distributive (i.e., dominating) strategies as well as passive (i.e., avoiding) strategies will typically result in less information exchange, therefore, decreasing the possibility of reducing conflict.

Personality Preferences

When looking around, it is not difficult to see the apparent physical differences between people. People display differences in heights, sex, skin color, hair color, weight, and so forth. It is without doubt that people are, in fact, different on the outside. However, once beyond the physical exterior, there is another world of differences. Keirsey and Bates (1984) emphasize how people are also fundamentally different: "They want different things; they have different motives, purposes, aims, values, needs, drives, impulses, urges . . . They believe differently: they think, cognize, conceptualize, perceive, understand, comprehend, and cogitate differently" (p. 2). These unique differences have commonly been attributed to our personality traits. The concept of personality is well established in research literature and, similar to conflict styles, personality has been conceptualized in a variety of ways.

Psychological Types and "The Big Five"

Carl Jung, dubbed the "inventor of psychological types" by Keirsey and Bates (1984), described personality as "our preference for how we 'function'" (p. 3). Moreover, Jung's theory of psychological types proposed eight equal but different "ways of perceiving and relating to the environment" (Jung, 1923/1971 as quoted in Cohen, Cohen & Cross, 1981, p. 884). Jung's typology has typically been adopted by other personality researchers allowing for the development of some of the more commonly used personality measures today. To Jung's types of extraversion-introversion, thinking-feeling, and sensing-intuition, Myers and Briggs extended Jung's theory by adding an extra dichotomous pair of types referred to as judgment-perception (Cohen et al., 1981) resulting in the MBTI personality instrument that is applied to education and widely used by career counselors and human resources departments (Capraro & Capraro, 2002). In turn, Keirsey (Keirsey & Bates, 1984) developed his own measures of these types, which he called temperaments.

The five-factor theory of personality, nicknamed the Big Five, that was developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) includes an extraversion dimension that is similar to Jung's personality type extraversion-introversion (as cited in Wood & Bell, 2008). According to Wood and Bell (2008), this personality theory states that, "an individual's personality can be described along five dimensions: extraversion-introversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and agreeableness" (p. 128).

Although personality is conceived of in a variety of ways, two dimensions are of particular interest to the researcher in this study: extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler. Because extraversion-introversion refers to one's willingness to engage with others and thinker-feeler refers to one's degree of concern for others, these preferences were chosen because of their similarity of focus to the dimensions of conflict styles: Rahim's (1992) concern for self versus other as well as Blake and Mouton's (1964) concern for production versus person (as described in Rahim & Magner, 1995).

Extraversion/Introversion and Thinker/Feeler Personality Types

Capraro and Capraro (2002) write that the extraversion-introversion dimension "focuses on whether one's general attitude toward the world is oriented outward to other persons and objects (E) or is internally oriented (I)" (p. 593). Individuals who prefer extraversion become energized when around people, while individuals with preferences for introversion tend to require solitude to gain energy (Keirsey & Bates, 1984). Extraverts desire social interactions and enjoy activities that will involve talking, playing, or working with other people. On the other hand, introverts are territorial, value their space, and prefer activities that enable them to be alone such as reading or meditating (Keirsey & Bates, 1984). Similarly, "The Big Five" define extraversion as one's preference for interaction with others (Shaver & Brennan (1992). Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz and Knafo (2002) explain that those who score high on this dimension are more apt to be talkative and active while those who score low are more apt to be reserved and cautious.

Thinkers and feelers differ in how they approach their decision-making process. Thinkers approach decisions with logic while feelers have a more subjective, interpersonal feeling approach (Capraro & Capraro, 2002). Thinkers can be perceived as being heartless or cold while feelers can be perceived as being too emotional or people who wear their hearts on their sleeves. According to Keirsey and Bates (1984), thinkers view through "logic rather than appeal to the emotions and feelers make choices in the context of the personal impact of the decision on the people around them" (p. 22).

Personality is a psychological idea and, at first, may appear to be a bit odd to study such an area in communication. In actuality, it is not a strange aspect of communication research at all. Personality is an important link to the whole communication process since how we communicate is influenced by our individual traits (Booth-Butterfield, 2002). Booth-Butterfield (2002) makes the argument that, "[i]n decoding messages, traits affect how we *perceive and interpret* the messages coming in to us" (p. 58).

Perceptions

McCornack (2007) defines perception as when "we actively create the meanings we assign to people, their communication, and our relationships" (p. 81). Individuals work from their perceptions and not actual reality (McCornack, 2007). What an individual perceives may be far from actuality. It is through our perceptions that we create what is real. Thus, it is not only our understanding of the world that takes root in our perceptions, but also our misunderstandings (Young, 1999). Perception as a guide to our interpersonal communication (McCornack, 2007) has not failed to become a subject of interest in communication research. Various studies have explored perception and its influence on satisfaction (Acitelli et al., 1993; Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Hojatt, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995) and on our subsequent behaviors (Sillars, 1980).

Ptacek and Dodge (1995) study explored if any relationship could be found between perceptions of a partner's methods for coping with stress and satisfaction. They hypothesized that "because one's feelings and behaviors are influenced by one's perceptions others . . . perceptions of one partner about the other's coping (with stress) would similarly relate to relationship satisfaction" (p. 78). The stress-coping strategies were ranked according to their perceived level constructiveness or destructiveness. Problem-focused strategies that involved active coping and social support as well as emotion-focused strategies that involved emotional social support or religion were seen as positive. On the other hand, less-useful coping strategies such as venting emotions and mental disengagement were viewed negatively. The findings supported Ptacek and Dodge's prediction. Participants reported lower satisfaction with the relationship when they perceived that their partners used less-useful, more destructive, coping strategies (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995).

In a different study that examined roommate relationships, Sillars (1980) suggested that "[p]eople choose conflict strategies based on attributions about the partner's intent to cooperate, the locus of responsibility for conflict, and the stability of conflict" (p. 182). For example, if one expects his or her partner to resist any form of compromising or integrating, Sillars (1980) proposed that this individual would not engage in these types of strategies due to the perceived expectation of the partner. Only when the partner is perceived to be cooperative would the individual use these strategies. His findings indicated that how an individual may perceive their roommate to respond to their behavior would ultimately influence his or her choice of behavior. Support was found for Sillars' (1980) claim that perceptions of another do influence one's own actions.

Not only do we attempt to understand and act because of our perceptions, perceptions provide a means to view others in relation to how similar or dissimilar we are to them (Booth-Butterfield, 2002). Booth-Butterfield states that "[t]his perception of *homophily* refers to how similar we perceive ourselves to be with other communicators" (p. 30). Individuals naturally have a tendency to be attracted to those similar to themselves for a few reasons. Similarities are attractive in a relationship because they reduce uncertainty, reinforce our own attitudes and behaviors, and tend to make relational life easier (Booth-Butterfield, 2002).

Researchers have examined similarity in relationships under a variety of contexts. For example, partners who are similar in their communication traits tend to be more satisfied (Martin & Anderson, 1992). In another study, a relationship was found between similarity in physical attractiveness and satisfaction (Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991). Researchers have also found some support for matching of roommates with similar personality preferences as to allow for increased satisfaction and liking (Carli et al., 1991). All in all, the research findings seem to prove Booth-Butterfield's (2002) point that, "[i]n general, the more similar we perceive other people to be, the more we view them positively and the greater the likelihood that we will want to purse a relationship with them" (p. 30).

Hypotheses

The differences of personality preference described by Jung, Keirsey, and Myers-Briggs, led to a prediction that a preference for extraversion or introversion and thinking or feeling would lead one to perceive conflict styles differently. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Extraverts perceive conflict styles differently than introverts.

H2: Thinkers perceive conflict styles differently than feelers.

Feelers are more subject to emotions than logic. They are more aware of the personal impact their decisions have on others (Keirsey & Bates, 1984) and may desire more conflict management strategies that promote preservation of the relationship by considering others' concerns. On the other hand, thinkers view the world rationally. They appeal to logic rather than emotion when making their decisions (Keirsey & Bates, 1984). It is predicted that for example, the dominating conflict style that is commonly seen as an inappropriate method of handling conflict, will be seen differently by an individual who values rational thinking and logic. For a thinker, dominating may be perceived as an efficient or effective way of getting one's own opinions and problems out in the open. Based on this information, the following is predicted.

H3: Feelers who perceive conflict styles including integrating, compromising, and obliging will experience more satisfaction than when they perceive conflict styles such as avoidance and dominating.

H4: Thinkers who perceive dominating will experience more satisfaction than feelers.

As mentioned previously, extraverts are more likely to engage and interact with others and, therefore, may actively try to change their circumstances when they are not satisfied. Unlike the more outgoing extraverts, introverts tend to draw inwards and value privacy and, thus, may prefer to focus on changing their behavior in conflict situations. It is predicted for example than that, avoidance and obliging, while not commonly seen as effective conflict styles, may be perceived as positive conflict style by introverts as it allows them to draw inwards and change personal behavior. Working under the assumption that individuals are attracted to similarity and prefer when others are and act like them, the final hypotheses are proposed.

H5a: Extraverts who perceive conflict styles such as obliging and avoidance will experience less satisfaction than when they perceive integrating, compromising, and dominating.

H5b: Introverts who perceive integrating, compromising, and dominating will experience less satisfaction than when they perceive conflict styles of obliging and avoidance.

H6a: Extraverts who perceive conflict styles such as obliging and avoidance will feel less satisfaction when they perceive these conflict styles than when introverts do.

H6b: Introverts who perceive dominating, integrating, and compromising will experience less satisfaction when they perceive these conflict styles than when extraverts do.

Method

Participants

Participants (*N* = 133; 37 males, 96 females) were recruited from a small liberal arts college in their first-year oral communication courses. These classes were chosen because all first year students must take the course, guaranteeing that the sample would include freshman students with a range of majors. Criterion for inclusion in the sample was that participants be in their first year and that they live in an on-campus residence hall with at least one roommate.

A majority of the participants were assigned to their first roommate (*N* = 111, 84%). Virtually all were still presently living with their first roommate at the time of the survey (*N* = 129, 98%); however, fewer participants indicated that they would choose to live with their first roommate in future semesters (*N* = 83, 63%). Most participants described their roommates as a close (*N* = 56, 42%) or casual (*N* = 51, 38%) friend, although, a few described their roommate as an acquaintance (*N* = 23, 17%) or stranger (*N* = 3, 2%).

Procedure

Communication professors were contacted at the end of the fall semester and asked for permission to take 15-20 minutes of class time to conduct a short survey at a time convenient to them. The surveys were distributed and completed at the end of the first semester. Questions included in the survey measured one's own personality preferences for extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler, perceptions of how the roommate handles conflicts, and the level of satisfaction felt within the roommate relationship. Prior to taking the survey, students were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and that all responses were confidential and anonymous. Each participant received an informed consent form before being allowed to complete the survey. One consent form was signed, dated, and returned with the survey, while the other consent form was kept by participants for future reference. Signed consent forms were collected and stored separately from the surveys themselves.

Variables

Personality preferences. Each participant completed an edited version of the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1984) that focused on the personality preferences of extraversion-introversion (E/I; 10 items) and thinking-feeling (T/F; 10 items). For each item, participants were instructed to choose one answer that suited them for 51% of the time indicating a definite preference for both E/I and T/F. Each extravert and thinking response was weighted with 1 point and each introvert and feeling response was weighted with 2 points. The sum of the responses indicated a respondent's preferences. A score over 15 on the E/I measure was considered indicative of introverts, while a score under 15 was considered indicative of

extraversion. Similarly, a score over 15 on the T/F measure indicated a feeler preference, and a score under 15 indicated a thinker preference. The Kuder-Richardson 20 coefficient of reliability was used to calculate the inter-item reliability for both measures. Inter-item reliability for E/I was .77. Because of its low reliability, items were dropped from the T/F measure, resulting in a 4-item measure (KR-20 = .69).

Perception of roommate's conflict style. Perceived conflict styles of participants' roommates were measured using a shortened version of the Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory – II (ROCI II; Rahim 1983). The instrument measures "the five styles of handling interpersonal conflict – integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising" (Rahim & Magner, 1995, p. 122). This portion of the questionnaire consists of 4 items per conflict style with a total of 20 items. Participants were asked to respond asking themselves the question of how their first roommate handles conflicts within their relationship. A 5-point Likert scale was used in which 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Chronbach's alpha reliabilities were calculated for each of the 5 styles: integrating = .91; compromising = .82; obliging = .87; dominating = .81; and, avoiding =. 71.

Relationship satisfaction. Satisfaction was measured using a shortened version of Wheeless' (1978) Interpersonal Solidarity Scale as found in Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher (1994) adapted to roommate relationships. Rubin et al. (1994) define interpersonal solidarity as "a feeling of closeness between people that develops as a result of shared sentiments, similarities, and intimate behaviors" (p. 223). This scale was used as a proxy for satisfaction with the reasoning that more feelings of closeness in a relationship would result in higher satisfaction. The questionnaire included 12 items measuring satisfaction. Participants were asked to mark each statement indicating how much they agreed with the statement on a 5-point Likert scale, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Chronbach's alpha reliability for satisfaction = .94.

Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2: Perceptions of Conflict Style Use

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, a 2 (sex) x 2 (E/I) x 2 (T/F) x 5 (conflict style) reduced model MANOVA was conducted. Hypothesis 1 predicted that introverts would perceive conflict styles differently than extraverts. Similarly, Hypothesis 2, predicted that feelers and thinkers would perceive conflict styles differently. Hypotheses 1 and 2 received some support. While multivariate main effects for E/I, multivariate F (5, 87) = 1.84, $p > .05$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .91$, and for T/F, multivariate F (5, 87) = 1.30, $p > .05$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .93$, were not found, some univariate effects for these personality variables were found.

Univariate effects were found for extraversion-introversion and perceptions of integrating, univariate F (1, 91) = 5.60, p = .02, eta^2 = .06. Extraverts (m = 3.71) were more likely to perceive their roommates as using integrative conflict styles more than introverts (m = 3.29). In addition, univariate effects were found for thinker-feeler and perceptions of obliging, univariate F (1, 91) = 5.28, p < .02, eta^2 = .06. Thinkers (m = 3.11) were less likely to perceive their roommates using obliging conflict styles than were feelers (m = 3.61).

Additionally, post hoc analysis revealed that introversion-extraversion interacted with sex, multivariate F (5, 87) = 2.90, p < .02, Wilks' Λ = .86. Introverted males perceived that their roommates used compromising, avoiding, and obliging more frequently, and integrating and dominating less frequently, than introverted females. A reverse pattern was observed for extraverted males and females. See Table 1 for summary of means.

Table 1
Mean Scores for Sex and E/I Personality Preference and Perception of Conflict Styles

	Introvert		Extravert	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Integrating	3.02	3.42	4.05	3.56
Compromising	3.13	3.11	3.27	3.30
Dominating	2.62	3.00	2.90	2.74
Avoidance	3.60	3.12	3.13	3.23
Obliging	3.33	3.31	3.35	3.62

Hypotheses 3 through 6: Satisfaction with Roommate Conflict Styles

To test Hypotheses 3 through 6, the data were split so that only those participants who perceived their roommates used high levels of a particular conflict style were included in the analysis. A series of 2 (sex) x 2 (E/I) x 2 (T/F) factorial ANOVAs were used to test hypotheses for each conflict style. Only Hypothesis 6b was somewhat supported. A significant difference was revealed for E/I and satisfaction with the use of compromising conflict style, F (1, 46) = 5.37, p < .03, eta^2 = .11. When participants perceived high levels of compromising, extraverts (m = 4.10) were more satisfied than introverts (m = 3.72). No other support for other hypotheses was found.

Post hoc analyses revealed that integrating, compromising, and obliging were all correlated positively with satisfaction, while avoiding was negatively correlated with satisfaction, regardless of participants' personality preferences. Dominating seemed uncorrelated with satisfaction. See Table 2 for a summary of correlations for conflict styles and satisfaction for all personality preferences.

Table 2
Correlations for Satisfaction with Conflict Styles for Personality Preferences

	Extravert (*n*=68)	Introvert (*n*=51)	Thinker (*n*=36)	Feeler (*n*=71)
Integrating	.76**	.76**	.88**	.78**
Compromising	.65**	.67**	.72**	.65**
Obliging	.48**	.59**	.66**	.47**
Dominating	.19	.11	.23	.12
Avoiding	-.50**	-.34*	-.54**	-.44**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Discussion

Personality, conflict style, and satisfaction are variables that are commonly examined in research for romantic or marital relationships (Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005). In this study, the researcher aimed to discover whether personality preferences affected perceptions of another's conflict style in roommate relationships, thus influencing satisfaction. Hypotheses 1 and 2 proposed that personality preferences for extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler would have an effect on how one perceives a roommate's conflict style. Specifically, extraverts would perceive conflict styles differently than introverts and vice versa, as well as thinkers would perceive conflict styles differently than feelers and so on. Hypotheses 3 through 6 predicted that personality preferences would lead to differing levels of satisfaction with specific perceived conflict styles. The results of this study were both more and less complex than originally predicted.

Although not many differences in perceptions of conflict emerged, effects were found for E/I preferences and perceptions of integrating, and T/F preferences and perceptions of obliging. The data showed that extraverts were more likely to perceive their roommates as using integrative conflict styles more than introverts, and feelers were more likely to perceive their roommates using obliging styles than thinkers. A possible explanation may be that due to their tendency to talk and work with other people along with their social nature (Keirsey & Bates, 1984), extraverts are more likely to use and prefer integrating styles than introverts. Moreover, feelers, who are more likely to take into consideration feelings of the parties involved (Keirsey & Bates, 1984), may tend to use and prefer obliging styles more than thinkers. It may be that one's own preferences for conflict management assist in the perception of other's conflict style; meaning that since one would prefer a certain conflict style, one would be more apt to see that conflict style being used by another (McCornack, 2007).

Post hoc analysis also revealed a statistically significant multivariate effect regarding personality preference and perception of conflict styles when a participant's sex was taken into consideration. Female introverts perceived more integrating than male introverts and male

extraverts perceived more integrating than female extraverts. Still, both male and female extraverts perceived their roommates as using more integrating (and compromising and obliging) conflict styles than either male or female introverts. Additionally, male introverts perceived more avoiding than female introverts and female extraverts perceived more avoidance than male extraverts. In this case, though, male introverts reported the highest levels of perceptions of avoidance, while female introverts reported the lowest levels, with perceptions for male and female extraverts falling in between.

The current study's findings supported previous research findings (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Hojjat, 2000; Morry & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sillars, 1980) on conflict styles by indicating that integrating, compromising, and obliging were positively correlated with satisfaction while avoiding was negatively correlated. There was an exception, however, regarding the dominating conflict style. Prior studies (Cramer, 2000; Cramer, 2002; Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Hojjat, 2000) have found dominating to be a conflict style perceived negatively and least preferred when wanting to reduce conflict. In spite of this, the findings in this study indicated dominating to not have a significant impact on satisfaction whatsoever within roommate relationships, thus not supporting previous findings. There may be a couple of possible explanations for this. One reason may be that perhaps participants are simply not seeing dominating being used by their roommate. Another reason may be that participants may not want to describe their roommate as using a dominating conflict style, therefore, allowing them to avoid having to make such harsh attributions.

The findings in this study, however, did reveal integrating to be the conflict style most positively correlated with satisfaction. It would be suggested then that perceiving more integrating styles being used by a roommate would result in more satisfaction with the relationship. Thus, female introverts would be more satisfied than male introverts and male extraverts would be more satisfied than female extraverts because they perceived more integrating styles being used. This framework of thinking would work regarding avoiding as well. Data indicated the avoiding conflict style to be least positively correlated with satisfaction. It could be suggested then that because male introverts and female extraverts perceived more avoiding by their roommates, they would experience less satisfaction in their relationships than their counterparts.

Previous research has suggested that personality preferences may be predictors of using certain conflict styles (Sorenson, Hawkins, & Sorenson, 1995; Wood & Bell, 2008). The current study went further in suggesting that personality preferences would also influence how one sees the different conflict styles. It was proposed that an individual with the personality preference of extraversion or introversion and thinker or feeler would perceive the conflict styles differently than what is socially accepted. For instance, it is socially accepted that avoiding is perceived negatively; however, this study made an argument that perhaps an introvert who tends to draw inward and value privacy may prefer to draw away from the conflict situation and would prefer other to do the same. In this situation, avoiding would not be seen as negative conflict style. However, this suggestion was not supported as the data continued to support previous research

regarding the socially accepted ranking of the conflict styles. A possible explanation may be that specific conflict styles are ingrained in us to be either socially acceptable or not. It may be that one recognizes avoiding and then reports low satisfaction, the socially desirable response because it *should* be that one feels low satisfaction when someone avoids conflict. The findings present a complex and perhaps a bit tenuous question. Were the conflict styles perceived as they were because they are *supposed* to be viewed that way? Was avoiding perceived negatively because participants would prefer to see their roommate acknowledge the conflict; or, was avoiding perceived negatively because it is *supposed* to be viewed negatively as set by social standards?

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As with most research, the current study was not without its problems. One limitation to this study is the makeup of its sample. The course in which the surveys were distributed was chosen in the hope to get a randomized sample of the freshman class, and this was achieved in some respects (e.g., a wide variety of majors were represented). Still, the sample turned out to be fairly homogeneous as it was dominated by female participants. Indeed, the numbers did comply with the sex statistics of the college; however, future research may find it beneficial to seek an equal number of men and women participants.

A second limitation of the study is the number of participants that were recruited. With a small sample, it could simply be that there were not enough surveys collected to test some of the hypotheses adequately. Future research could seek to recruit a higher number of participants allowing for more sufficient testing of the hypotheses with a larger sample as well as allowing for the ability to examine the extremes in regards to personality preferences. This study created high and low categories for extraversion-introversion and thinker-feeler preferences by splitting at the middle score possible for each measure, resulting in a participant being categorized as either an extravert or introvert and a thinker or feeler. Booth-Butterfield (2002) explains that personality traits have the most influence when they either are at very high or very low levels. In the current study, many of the participants scored moderately on the scales of E/I and T/F, and it would be intriguing in future research to find differences in perceptions of other's conflict styles with individuals scoring at the extremes of each personality trait.

Future studies may also want to include second-year students in the sample. These students by now have had a full year to adjust to college life and have already experienced a roommate living situation. By extending the sample in this way, future research has the opportunity to explore the differences and similarities between first-year and second-year perceptions of their roommates and their perceived quality of the relationship.

To extend the work of the current study, the researcher intends to further explore the impact similarity of conflict style preference has on satisfaction. In a future study, participants will be surveyed on their personality preferences as well as how they generally view themselves to manage conflict. In addition, participants will be asked not only how they perceive their

roommate's conflict style to be, but also what conflict style the participants would prefer to see their roommate using. This opens up a couple of possibilities for research. One possibility is to explore if differing levels of personality preferences can predict use of certain conflict styles. Another possibility of the study is to examine the similarities and differences between the participant's own preference for managing conflict and the participant's preference for how their roommate should manage conflict. It may be interesting to find if the disparity, if any, between the ideal conflict style for the roommate and the actual conflict style of the roommate impacts satisfaction within the relationship.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the research on roommate relationships by examining the variables of personality preference, conflict style, and satisfaction while considering the role that perceptions have on these variables. Although the findings of this study were not always as predicted by the researcher, they may still prove to be of positive significance for college residence hall staff and communication researchers.

The results of this study supported past research findings that certain conflict styles, such as integrating and compromising, will typically lead to greater relational satisfaction than other styles like avoiding. This study can be useful to helping students understand that their personality preferences may influence how they perceive their roommates' behaviors, specifically conflict style use. While it is very difficult for someone to change his or her personality, such a change is not necessary to maintain satisfying roommate relationships. Rather, it is much easier to teach students better communication skills and to explain the benefits of using certain conflict styles over others. Given that successful roommate relationships contribute to having a better, more pleasurable college experience, as a staff member of residence life, I feel that it is an important lesson for students to become aware of their perceptions as well as how to cope constructively with roommate conflicts that are seemingly inevitable.

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